

## **FISH and WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET**

**Meeting Date:** November 12, 2015

**Agenda Item:** Willard Fee Title Addition to Blackfoot-Clearwater Wildlife Management Area

**Division:** Wildlife

**Action Needed:** Endorsement

**Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation:** 10 minutes

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### **Background**

The Willard family has been negotiating with FWP and the Five Valleys Land Trust (Five Valleys) since spring 2014 to conserve a private land inholding along the north side of the Blackfoot Clearwater Wildlife Management Area (BCWMA) in Missoula County. The intent of this proposal is to purchase approximately 22 acres of land, which is surrounded on three sides by the BCWMA (see maps). This strategic purchase would help maintain wildlife habitat and connectivity values, including wetland and forested habitats. Surrounding lands provide elk winter range and seasonal habitats for grizzly bear, Canada lynx, and other forest carnivores. The conservation partnership will continue to work with the landowner to consider other options for conserving the landowner's remaining holdings.

### **Public Involvement Process & Results**

To date there has been little public involvement out of respect for the landowner and the project partner – Five Valleys. Based on the history of land conservation in the Blackfoot Valley, we anticipate strong community support. If endorsed, FWP would conduct an Environmental Assessment and associated public review.

### **Alternatives and Analysis**

If no action is taken, the 22-acre parcel would continue under private ownership surrounded on three sides by the BCWMA. The landowners have expressed an interest in disposing of the property and could sell or residentially develop the property. Under the proposed action, FWP would purchase the 22-acre property and manage it as part of the BCWMA, removing a partial in-holding and maintaining wildlife habitat values on the parcel and adjacent WMA lands.

### **Agency Recommendation & Rationale**

This project would add a 22-acre partial in-holding that is currently surrounded on three sides by the BCWMA. The result would not add substantial burden to FWP but would simplify management of the BCWMA, while conserving important wildlife habitat.

### **Proposed Motion**

I move the Commission endorse this 22-acre addition to the Blackfoot Clearwater WMA, allowing FWP to conduct analysis and associated public review.